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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8015
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 1416
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 1975
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 4953
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4933
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 8500
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 6067
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 1547
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1747
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA 0398
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3954
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/Joint STAFF WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1917
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000634

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS, INR/B, INR/EAP
PACOM FOR FPA
DEPT PASS TO USAID/ANE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/07/2018
TAGS: PREL PGOV EAGR ECON BM
SUBJECT: BURMESE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE: FUTURE IS BRIGHT

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Classified By: Economic Officer Samantha A. Carl-Yoder for Reasons 1.4
(b and d)

¶11. (C) Summary. During the Charge's out-going call on Minister of Agriculture Major General Htay Oo, the Minister focused on the importance of promoting stability throughout Burma for the overall development of the country. Major General Htay Oo lauded the regime's seven step "roadmap to democracy," noting the importance of public and organizational participation while emphasizing the need for unity. As the Secretary General of the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA), Htay Oo claimed that USDA's primary purpose was to assist the Burmese people while promoting peace and stability. He dismissed stories of USDA members arresting pro-democracy activists, ignoring the Charge's pointed remarks about USDA thugs attacking peaceful pro-democracy activists. He refused to elaborate on whether the USDA would register as a political party for the 2010 elections. The Minister also highlighted efforts to promote agricultural production in the delta. End Summary.

USDA to "Assist" the People

¶12. (C) After providing Charge with a shorter-than-usual history of Burma, Minister of Agriculture and USDA Secretary General Htay Oo claimed that the military government succeeded in establishing peace and stability in Burma, one of its key priorities. The regime would next form a democratic government, where people and organizations would be able to participate and develop the country. He noted that the GOB's "roadmap to democracy" allowed ethnic groups to share and express different viewpoints about the future of Burma. He asserted that the only way to organize the people of Burma was for the government and other organizations, such as the Union Solidarity and Development Association (USDA),

to assist them through the development of social services and infrastructure.

¶ 13. (C) Htay Oo proudly discussed the role of USDA in maintaining stability in Burma. The organization's primary purpose was to assist the people, he claimed. With more than 25 million members, the USDA worked along side the government to develop infrastructure and social services at the grassroots level, including building schools and clinics. He acknowledged that some members of the USDA did not have "good attitudes or behavior," but denounced stories that USDA members arrested pro-democracy activists. When the Charge inquired about the often brutal activities of Swan Arr Shin, a group of USDA thugs, against peaceful protestors, the Minister acted as though he had never heard the term before. He reiterated the good work of the USDA, noting his belief that bad people should be punished while the good should be assisted.

¶ 14. (C) Asked whether USDA would form a political party to participate in the 2010 elections, Minister Htay Oo avoided the question, stating that it was "up to the people to decide."

Promoting Agricultural Development

¶ 15. (C) The Charge noted that the United States provided significant agricultural assistance to Burma in the 1950s and 1960s. The USG might be willing to provide additional assistance after real, meaningful political change occurred in Burma. She expressed her hope that the 2010 elections would meet international standards and that Burma would form

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a democratic government that allowed people to discuss views peacefully without fear of repression or arrest. The Charge inquired about whether the GOB would be open to a dialogue on agricultural policies and how to promote economic growth.

¶ 16. (C) Instead of answering her question, Minister Htay Oo launched into an explanation of his Ministry's programs to promote agricultural development. He noted that due to Ministry of Agriculture projects, the economic conditions of farmers, roughly 70 percent of the population, had improved dramatically. Burma had moved toward a market-based system, where farmers are able to buy and sell without State control, he explained. The GOB, he opined, was "ready to collaborate" on any training opportunities and cited the Ministry's work with ASEAN and the FAO on food security issues. He also discussed briefly the GOB's difficulties in controlling the smuggling of rice to neighboring countries.

Comment

¶ 17. (C) Rumors abound that Major General Htay Oo will resign as Minister of Agriculture and Secretary General of USDA so he can form a political party to participate in the 2010 elections. Htay Oo reportedly is a favorite of the senior generals and allegedly has the ear of Than Shwe. UN agencies and INGOs praised his assistance in getting relief supplies to the delta after Cyclone Nargis. However, he came across as nothing more than hot air, filibustering at length without offering anything of substance.

VILLAROSA